

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03 INR-10 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-07 PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01 SP-03 SS-20

USIA-15 NEA-10 TRSE-00 SAJ-01 ACDA-19 IO-14 OIC-04

AEC-11 OMB-01 DRC-01 /161 W
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R 171644Z APR 74

FM AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7981

INFO AMCONSUL LENINGRAD BY POUCH

USMISSION NATO

C O N F I D E N T I A L MOSCOW 5703

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, UR, US

SUBJECT: CONVERSATION WITH KHLESTOV ON MBFR

REF: VIENNA 3270

1. SUMMARY. DURING MY CALL APRIL 16 ON CHIEF OF SOVIET MBFR DELEGATION, KHLESTOV STRESSED DIFFERENCES BETWEEN TWO SIDES BUT EVALUATED LONG-TERM PROSPECTS AS QUITE POSITIVE. HE SUGGESTED BILATERAL U.S.-USSR TALKS BEFORE CONFERENCE RECONVENES, EITHER IN WASHINGTON OR IN MOSCOW. HE CAME DOWN PARTICULARLY HARD ON NEED FOR COMMITMENT TO REDUCE FRG FORCES, AND HE REPEATED HIS STATEMENT OF APRIL 9 THAT USSR CONSIDERS ANTI-AIRCRAFT DEFENSE TO BE PART OF GROUND FORCES. END SUMMARY.

2. I CALLED APRIL 16 ON MFA TREATY AND LEGAL DIVISION CHIEF AND SOVIET MBFR NEGOTIATOR OLEG KHLESTOV, WITH WHOM I HAD WORKED TEN YEARS AGO IN NEGOTIATING BILATERAL CONSULAR AGREEMENT. ALTHOUGH KHLESTOV IS RESPONSIBLE FOR LOS AND OTHER MATTERS, THE MAIN TOPIC
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TURNED OUT TO BE MBFR. KHLESTOV VOLUBLY DEFENDED

WARSAW PACT MBFR POSITION AND CRITICISED WESTERN APPROACH. KHLESTOV ARGUED FOR INCLUSION OF AIR FORCE AND NUCLEAR UNITS AND FOR FIRST-PHASE REDUCTION BY ALL PARTIES (HE CALLED ALLIED APPROACH INTERNALLY INCONSISTENT SINCE IT DID NOT INCLUDE "FOREIGN" FORCES OF UK AND CANADA). HE ATTACKED "DISPARITY" OF NUMBERS IN WESTERN POSITION, CHALLENGING WEST TO APPLY ITS PERCENTAGE APPROACH TO FRG/GDR REDUCTIONS. AND HE COMPLAINED THAT SOVIET SIDE WOULD HAVE TO REMOVE ITS EQUIPMENT WHILE U.S. STOCKPILED IT. HE SAID THAT AT START OF TALKS IT WAS USSR WHICH WAS ACCUSED OF NOT WANTING TO REDUCE; NOW, HE SAID, SHOE IS ON THE OTHER FOOT.

3. AT SAME TIME KHLESTOV AVOIDED GLOOM IN ASSESSING PROSPECTS FOR PROGRESS. HE NOTED WITH SATISFACTION THAT SIDES HAD AGREED ON NEED TO PURSUE SECURITY AT LOWER FORCE LEVELS AND TO SEEK NO UNILATERAL ADVANTAGE. HE CALLED THE INFORMAL CONSULTATIONS IN VIENNA USEFUL. AND HE CHARACTERIZED TALKS AS A WHOLE AS USEFUL AND SERIOUS, ADDING, "WE ARE CONDEMNED TO SUCCEED."

4. AMONG POINTS OF SPECIFIC INTEREST, KHLESTOV DISPLAYED NEAR-OBSESSION WITH EXCLUSION OF FRG FROM FIRM COMMITMENT TO REDUCE. HE SAID THIS WAS NOT ONLY A MILITARY PROBLEM FOR USSR BUT A PSYCHOLOGICAL ONE. HE DISMISSED LINKAGE BETWEEN U.S.-SOVIET REDUCTION AND AGREEMENT TO DISCUSS NATIONAL REDUCTIONS IN SECOND PHASE WITH ASSERTION THAT, WHILE SOVIETS WOULD BE COMMITTED TO REDUCE, FRG WOULD JUST BE COMMITTED TO TALK. HOWEVER, WHEN I SUGGESTED POSSIBILITY OF SOME SORT OF UNDERSTANDING TO PREVENT INCREASES DURING PHASE TWO NEGOTIATIONS, KHLESTOV DID NOT RESPOND ONE WAY OR THE OTHER.

5. KHLESTOV REITERATED IDEA HE HAD BROACHED IN VIENNA OF A ONE PERCENT SYMBOLIC REDUCTION BUT SAID HE HAD FOUND NO WESTERN SUPPORT FOR IT. HE STRESSED ATMOSPHERIC IMPORTANCE OF "FIRST STEPS" AND SAID EASTERN PROPOSAL FOR REDUCTION BEGINNING NEXT YEAR WAS A CONFIDENTIAL

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FLEXIBLE ONE. BUT HE DID NOT SHOW ANY INCLINATION TOWARD TREATING ALLIED FIRST-PHASE PROPOSAL AS A GOOD WAY TO GET THINGS STARTED. KHLESTOV SHRUGGED OFF MY REFERENCE TO THE PREVIOUS SOVIET IDEA OF EQUAL-PERCENTAGE REDUCTIONS OF U.S. AND SOVIET TROOPS.

6. IN DISCUSSION OF STRUCTURE OF GROUND FORCES KHLESTOV REPEATED HIS STATEMENT (REFTEL) THAT USSR CONSIDERS

ANTI-AIRCRAFT DEFENSES AS PART OF GROUND FORCES EVEN
THOUGH OTHER COUNTRIES LIKE FRG DO NOT.

7. KHLESTOV RETURNED SEVERAL TIMES IN THE CONVERSATION
TO THE IMPORTANCE OF BILATERAL CONVERSATIONS BETWEEN
THE U.S. AND THE USSR. HE SAID THAT BEFORE RETURN TO
VIENNA, SOVIET SIDE IS READY FOR CONTACTS WITH RESOR,
POSSIBLY THROUGH DOBRYNIN, OR FOR TALKS HERE IN MOSCOW.

8. KHLESTOV SAID THE SOVIET DELEGATION WOULD RETURN TO
VIENNA MAY 9.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: ARMED FORCES, AIR DEFENSE, GROUND FORCES, NEGOTIATIONS, MUTUAL FORCE REDUCTIONS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 17 APR 1974
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: golinofr
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1974MOSCOW05703
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D740089-0622
From: MOSCOW
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1974/newtext/t19740436/aaaabgnu.tel
Line Count: 127
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION EUR
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators:
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: VIENNA 3270
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: golinofr
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 20 MAR 2002
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <20 MAR 2002 by collinp0>; APPROVED <07 MAY 2002 by golinofr>
Review Markings:

Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
30 JUN 2005

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: CONVERSATION WITH KHLESTOV ON MBFR
TAGS: PFOR, UR, US, GE
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 30 JUN 2005